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ABSTRACT

The educational sociologist has a major contribution to make to educators with regard to preparation of curriculum materials, teaching strategies, and guidance policies. Some areas of educational management that have sociological implications are a) discrepancies among views concerning the role of the school in society and its influence on social change, b) social class conflicts that affect the community and its school system, c) the consequences of various administrative styles upon students and parents with differing cultural backgrounds, and d) the need for interpreting the implications of rapid cultural change for education. It is essential that consideration of sociological factors become a routine part of future school administrative processes. This input must be based upon thoughtful scientific analysis and the carefully prepared recommendations of properly trained, competent practitioners in the social sciences. (HMD)

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SOCIOLOGY: AN ESSENTIAL TOOL FOR SCHOOL ADMINISTRATION

by

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Most school administrators will probably agree that any process that can enlighten the complex problems of public education should be routinely utilized. At the same time sociologists would probably agree that their discipline can find few fields to rival education as an area ripe for both sociological inquiry and the application of knowledge gained from a century of painstaking sociological work. Yet, practitioners in these two major areas of the behavioral sciences have scarcely a nodding acquaintance. This is a strange and disturbing problem with serious implications for both disciplines.

Educational leaders are constantly coping with the vexing problems of a turbulent society. Some of these problems are political, some financial, others racial, or psychological, but all share the common quality of bearing to a considerable degree upon the present welfare of children and the future welfare of society. It is just possible that the sociologist, assuming he had the training, insight, and competence, could add immeasurably to the quality of solutions developed in relation to these problems. He could, just possibly, also improve significantly the quality of decisions made by educators who deal each day with an endless array of controversial and far-reaching issues.

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Ordering the areas of educational management that have major sociological implications is difficult. Such a list, would surely include at least the following:

1. Discrepancies of views concerning the role of the school in society and its influence on social change.
2. The role and range of influence of special interest groups that exist in every community.
3. Social class conflicts that affect the community and its school system.
4. The value system of the many cultures and subcultures that are served by public education.
5. The consequences of various administrative styles upon students and parents with differing cultural backgrounds.
6. The influence on schools of children from different economic, ethnic and cultural backgrounds.
7. The interaction of various groups within the community and the resulting consequences for public opinion and public influence.
8. The impact on students and teachers of instructional materials based almost universally upon middle-class values.
9. The need for interpretation of implications on education of rapid cultural change.
10. The need for continuous analysis of community power structures and how their politicalization influences educational decisions.

This list could be expanded endlessly if one added the numerous variables that originate in the differences of attitudes and political ideals found among school trustees, superintendents and their staffs.

Examining several of these areas more closely adds weight to the basic premise that the educator and the sociologist should be close and co-operative colleagues.

Any number of educational theorists as well as sociologists have written of the school's role in influencing social change. Educators have been aware that the school is a subsystem within a larger social system; a subsystem which has been relatively isolated, bureaucratic, and frequently sluggish in terms of meeting the demands of a changing society. Far from being in the vanguard of change the school subsystem has, when impinged upon by changes in the larger social system, been more often reactionary than responsive. The intensely bureaucratic structure of the typical school system, with its formal lines of authority from trustees to teachers, limit the capacity of school systems to respond to change and to create the necessary reforms required to creatively serve a dynamic and changing society.

As once powerless groups have gained a voice, however, and became more aware that schools often do not serve their children well and do not respond to obvious needs, conflict has arisen.

Observing these and other difficulties of the American school, Patricia Sexton points out that educational reform suffers from a microscopic perspective and implies that the sociologist could have a useful role in school decision making:

> "A macrocosmic view in the location of pressure points in the social system and the school system may produce the change (and the funds and the tension) that are needed to improve classroom performance. The social scientist legitimately derives the given values of a society - such as freedom and democracy, equality, material progress - and notes the extent to which they are observed in its institutions. In the process, conclusions may be drawn and hypotheses developed which may aid social policy decisions and guide efforts to realize these values in the operation of school institutions."[1]

On the other hand, Jencks and his associates have defined the purposes of schools as being in conflict with the basic values of freedom, democracy and equality.

> "Schools serve primarily as selection and certification agencies, whose job is to measure and label people, and only secondarily as socialization agencies, whose job is to change people. This implies that schools serve primarily to legitimize inequality, not to create it."[2]

Ray Rist, provides a sociological view of how this labeling process happens in classrooms.[3] His account is chilling in terms of the assumptions educators make about equality of access to educational opportunities. Using a non-participant observer methodology Rist followed a kindergarten class through to the second grade. The teachers involved were considered by their superintendent to be among the best. On the eighth day of kindergarten the class was organized into three groups. Although the teacher's basis for grouping was her perception of their ability, the differences between groups were clearly reflections of social class. For example, all of the "lows", but none of the "highs", came from families on welfare. The "highs" spoke standard English; the "lows" did not. Throughout the three years, Rist illustrates the way in which the lows were left out or pushed to the periphery of classroom learning activities. At the end of the second grade, the class was still grouped substantially the same as on the eighth day of kindergarten.[4] Innumerable studies of a similar nature could be cited.

That the expectations of teachers determine who will be taught is hardly a new theory, but Rist's observations are frighteningly specific and familiar. The point is not that the teachers are biased or stupid, but that their behavior reflects standard operating procedures. These things can happen in classrooms because they are reflections of policies made, in part at the top of the structure, and

in part by teachers trained in a system that perpetuates a microscopic rather than a macrocosmic view of the role of the school. Until those who manage the system, control its policies and train its practitioners take a macrocosmic view of the functioning of schools, what happens in classrooms will become even more impervious to social change.

Perhaps sociology has failed to impart these critical findings to teachers, but equally obvious is the fact that school administrators have preferred to permit the perpetuation of the status quo, that at best fails for many children and actually damages others.

Every school administrator must certainly be alert and responsive to the shift of power that constantly occur in all but the most tradition-bound or closed communities. A sociologist with special abilities in the area of politics of education could be of great assistance to the school decision makers. With schools deeply imbedded in politics it is amazing that educators tend to be willfully naive when functioning in that arena, but the evidence is that they are. They frequently fail to improve and advance educational opportunities as a result of their lack of sophiscation and skill in dealing with political forces. As an example, school administrators could be advised of the relationships between themselves and community groups, or groups that are internal to the school system itself. There appears to be a very

different relationship, yet dimly understood, between low-income communities and their schools compared to that of middle-class or more affluent communities and their schools.

Much of what is termed "intergroup relations" or "manner relations" has to do with the treatment of minority groups in the same school setting. Desegregation questions are almost always political and fraught with the most highly charged emotional overtones of any of the activities of our society today. How is the superintendent to approach his board and the community on such politically explosive issues ? How does the board deal with the community and those groups which either accept or reject desegregation ? Throughout the country superintendents have tried different ways of dealing with these difficulties. Frequently opposed by community groups and, sometimes sabotaged by powerful constituencies inside the school district -- by an administrators' group, a professional unit, or cabinet-level officials -- superintendents have paid dearly for their efforts at engineering rational change.

The sociologist it seems, could be invaluable in assisting the administrator in developing strategies to cope with the power imbedded in school-related groups and to turn this power into positive channels for educational improvement, but too rarely has their advise been sought.

Top administrators also come occasionally into contact with problems that originate in the use and abuse of authority in schools. The traditional authoritarian system of schools, perpetuated by generation after generation of educators, tends to reduce the opportunity for the development of the mutual respect, confidence and tolerance that undergirds successful human relationships between teachers and students. What are the long-term consequences to society of such a system? Could a board of education and its staff significantly change this structure of authority and thus alter the consequences it has for the development of attitudes and behavior patterns of youngsters? Certainly a first step in that direction would be the recognition of the complexity of the problem as viewed by the social scientist. A mixture of sociological insight with the legitimate concerns of educators forced to deal with a mass-instructional system, might produce some startlingly new ways of structuring school experiences for youngsters as well as adults.

Rigid stratification also seems to be perpetuated by our present philosophy and method of operating public schools. We talk a great deal about the values and the strengths inherent in a pluralistic society, but these values can only be realized if the members of our society have a healthy respect for and feeling of trust in those who have a different social or cultural position. Pressure for interclass contact in the school as a "cornerstone of democracy", to prevent the emergence of social conduct which pit group against group in

class struggle, present school administrators with obvious problem, but also with opportunities to help develop citizens with a healthy appreciation of the contributions made by those from different cultures within our complex society. Development of housing with provision for residential heterogeniety, redrawing school attendance boundaries to develop a "mix" of social classes, or drastic busing programs which can create an explosive situation for school personnel lacking the skill, attitude and knowledge to handle it, are all examples of problems faced by many administrators of our urban school systems. Without the help of sociology the school only recreates the kind of stratification and polarization that is reflected in the larger society. Couldn't the special expertise of the sociologist be brought to bear upon problems of this type when administrators and trustees are making decisions relating to the mixing of classes and cultures in the public school setting?

A "devil's advocate" on the question of whether the sociologist could prove effective in the arena of educational management can point to scores of psychologists, guidance counselors, intergroup relations specialists, humanistically oriented teachers, etc., that are already functioning in school systems. Why have these professionals not had a greater impact upon educational policies, particularly those designed to solve problems created through the integration of highly diverse groups within the schools and in contact with those from diverse cultural groups without?

In response to such legitimate criticism, a number of possible answers come to mind. Taking one problem that many administrators consider among our most serious today may help illuminate the reasons the psychologically trained or oriented educator is not as effective as he should be in helping school districts make correct decisions when beset with critical problems.

As we all know violence on campus is escalating at an alarming rate. The schools of the greater Los Angeles area currently report an average of 170 incidents of violence per month. Included in this figure is the frightening average of 30 assaults on teachers and 12 assaults on police officers a month. Added to this is a monthly average of 128 assaults by students on other students; not with fists or occasional kicks that have typified school fights for decades, but with guns, knives and chains that once seemed reserved only to the "Westside Story" types. Dealing with the startling increase of violence on an individual basis through the use of psychologically oriented strategies seems futile and at times has proved to be counterproductive. The gangs, subcultures and numerous peer groups that have adopted violence as standard behavior have to be analyzed in sociological terms if one is to understand their origin and behavior. But, more important, the analysis must be translated to a language school administrators can understand and accept. Only then can understandings be incorporated into administrative practices and planning to develop ways of coping with the phenomena of campus

violence. Answers, obviously, are not easy to identify in this field, but it does seem strange that administrators seldom seek the counsel of the sociologist as these problems consume their energies.

To write off delinquent behavior as the "tradition" of an ethnic group, or the "way of life" of a subculture is obviously a "cop-out". To develop school-based remedial measures that exancerbate the problem is equally tragic. Yet this seems to be the predominant condition of many of our schools today, with little prospect of improvements unless more enlightened solutions are found.

Less dramatic but possibly equally significant in the long run is the daily battle the classroom teacher must wage to offer educational experiences that are productive for culturally different students. What the student does as he shifts from one culture in the home or the community to that of the typical school environment should be a matter of grave concern to teachers, and the typical school does to that student through the learning process imposed upon him should be a matter of grave concern to all of society.

We have traditionally viewed the public school as the institution which reflects and perpetuates the broad social and cultural values of our society. Although this may be true to some extent, it is also evident that an imperfect process may be involved that the school frequently fails to instill widely held values and attitudes and, more seriously,

creates a discontinuity for the individuals caught between cultures. As La Belle has pointed out.

> "The conflicts of cooperation versus competition, equality versus segregation, success in work versus social consciousness and sociability, independence versus obedience, and puritan morality versus situational ethics are only a few of the values which confront the American youngster as he attempts to learn appropriate culturally sanctioned behavior. Although such conflicts are most likely inevitable in a complex culture, the role of the school in coping with them is not yet clear. The youngster's peers provide sustenance for one set of value orientations, but the school and its referent culture are confused over which values to champion and under what conditions these values should be promoted. Thus the youngster may find solace with his peers and may work to promote continuity between opposing orientations. It is not that he rejects completely the values set out by the older generation; he cannot. Instead he seeks to establish an integrative, noncontradictory thread to give coherence to such values. The school, in both the recognized and unrecognized learning experiences to which it acts as catalyst, is able to

build upon this worthy effort by fostering consistency in such experience."[5]

La Belle would call his sociologically oriented specialist an "educational anthropologist." He goes on to point out that this specialist would have a cross-cultural perspective and through his study of child rearing and the family and community identify the potential impact the school has as the formal transmitter of culture within society.

Surely the educational sociologist must have a major contribution to make to educators as they prepare curriculum materials, plan teaching strategies and formulate guidance policies for a school that interacts directly with the external environment. Today, unfortunately, little attention is paid to the problems of discontinuity when educational programs are developed, implemented or evaluated.

For these reasons, it is essential that consideration of sociological factors become a routine part of tomorrow's school administrative processes. Such input must be based upon thoughtful, scientific analysis and the carefully prepared recommendations of properly trained competent practitioners in the social sciences.

Unfortunately, today's educational sociologists do not appear prepared to meet this challenge. Even if school administrators suddenly seek

the counsel of sociologists it is doubtful if more than a handful in the nation could respond effectively, if effectiveness is measured in terms of the hard, practical realities of today's school administrative processes. If the linkage that seem imperative to many of us at the cutting edge of public education is to be made it is obvious that a new type of sociologist must emerge. He will be a sociologist with all of the training and expertise normally found in the profession, but with the added dimension of knowledge about the legal, financial and political aspects of education. Of even greater importance, he will possess the willingness to jump into the middle of complex and controversial issues with the purpose of helping develop, test and implement solutions. He will need a high degree of competence, an extraordinary amount of courage and a steadfast belief that inherent in man is the intelligence and desire to solve the difficult problems that beset him in today's world.

The challenge to the profession of sociologists, to the institutions of higher learning responsible for the training of tomorrow's social scientists, and to the field of school administration appears monumental. Not as monumental, however, as the prospect of continuing to muddle along with educational management decisions based upon traditional factors that virtually ignore the fact that schools are institutions functioning in an ever more complicated social setting.

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